

*Pepla -*  
*LAMBERT*

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# Family honors daughter's spirit by giving to others

## For family who lost girl, giving helps defeat grief

By Karen Hayes  
 GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

DUXBURY - Last October Brittany Lambert's family bid a heart-wrenching farewell to their 13-year-old daughter, who, despite an indomitable spirit that inspired 2,000 potential donors to pack a bone marrow drive in an effort to save her life, lost her battle with a rare blood disorder.

Today, a year and two days after her death, more than 600 supporters are expected to run or walk in the first Brittany Lambert Memorial

Black Cat Classic 5K. Race proceeds will benefit the Brittany Lambert Foundation, a nonprofit formed by her family to ease the emotional and financial stress of others with children fighting life-threatening illness or injury.

Throughout her ordeal, Brittany refused to give in to the devastating effects of myelodysplasia, the disease that eventually led to the same leukemia that claimed US Senator Paul Tsongas's life. Just a month before her death, she insisted on starting school with her eighth-grade

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LINDA HAEHNEL of Duxbury,  
 Brittany Lambert's mother

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classmates, as well as taking part in the 10th annual Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk, the Weymouth Elks "Dream Come True" walk, and a week at Camp Sunshine in Maine.

And, just months after their tremendous loss, inspired by Brittany's courage and bolstered by a caring community, her family began channeling their grief into helping others in similar tragic circumstances, because, they say, that is what Brittany would have wanted them to do.

"We could do nothing; she's still going to live in our hearts," said Linda Haehnel, Brittany's mother. "But I think she had such an effect on our community that it just didn't seem appropriate not to do anything."

Last May, Linda and Jim Haehnel, Brittany's stepfather, and her older sister, Brianne Lambert, established the foundation to help defray families' costs not covered by medical insurance, such as gas, parking, and home modifications, and to

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provide resource information. Its seven-member board is all volunteer.

In most cases, they say, family income decreases during illness, while bills increase. After Brittany became seriously ill, Jim Haehnel left his job of four years as the Norwell building inspector and overseer of that town's fire station construction project to go into the construction business so his time could be more flexible. His wife closed her home day-care business to spend more time with Brittany.

The family was fortunate to receive financial support at the time from the community, they say, because their cause was well-publicized. But they frequently run into Duxbury families at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute whose plights are not recognized and who are not receiving assistance.

"It hits home," Jim Haehnel said. "You've got to do this for other people. You ask for help one day, and you hope you are in a position to give the next day."

Since establishing the foundation, the Haehnel family has made some considerable achievements.

"They are just inspirational people," said Norwell Fire Chief Paul Rosebach, a close family friend. "They do whatever it takes to get their goals accomplished."

The foundation formed a junior board of directors, consisting of students, who, with adults, serve monthly dinners to families of sick children at the Ronald McDonald House in Brookline. It sends cards to pediatric patients at the Jimmy Fund and Children's Hospital. On June 24, on Brittany's birthday, it began an annual donation of gifts to children in the cancer and bone marrow transplant units of Children's

Hospital. And it established an annual academic award at the middle school and a scholarship in Brittany's name for a graduating senior with an illness or disability.

"They really have turned around something that is devastating to most families and turned it into something wonderful," said Heather Kispert, a board member who is directing today's race and who ran last year's Boston Marathon for Brittany in a patient-partner program through Dana-Farber.

Joellen Rando, principal of Duxbury Middle School, which Brittany attended, planned to run in the race, along with other school staff. "They are wonderful people, very caring," Rando said of the Haehnels.

The family also took part in the recent Jimmy Fund Pan-Mass Challenge, as well as last weekend's Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk, and encourage others to volunteer for these and other causes, such as building a wheelchair ramp for a child in need, or donating blood platelets or bone marrow.

Linda Haehnel said the foundation is a way to give back to others some of what Brittany gave to her.

"She taught me a lot of things through all the stuff that she went through," she said. "How you can still get up every day and do what you want to do, not letting any opportunities pass you by. And yet, I know some of those days she was in total pain. But she wasn't going to give in to it. So, I think, I'm trying to look at this through her eyes. It's sort of an opportunity I have. It gives me a reason for getting out of bed every morning, something to focus on. And maybe the hope that she gave everybody else I can continue to give to them in her name."

*'They really have turned around something that is devastating to most families and turned it into something wonderful.'* HEATHER KISPERT, board member, Brittany Lambert Foundation





GLOBE PHOTO / BETHANY VERSOY

Linda and Jim Haehnel, with daughter Brianne Lambert (left), created a foundation in memory of daughter Brittany Lambert. The foundation helps defray families' costs not covered by medical insurance.